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Growing into a Life of Faith

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Adversity Training

by Betsy Hart
posted 9/7/07

In a recent issue of *Parenting* magazine, one mom recounted that it was hard for her to watch her child cast in a school pageant as the "cheese"—as in, the "cheese" that stands alone.

The child is three.

Yep—we are a culture that is terrified of adversity finding our kids. Strike that; we're terrified of even brief unpleasantness getting near our kids. I'm not sure it's even much different for the Christian culture. For instance, how many of us have been around parents on a Sunday morning who would never consider telling their three-year-old, "Do NOT interrupt—I'm talking to the grown-ups," for fear of bruising a delicate child's psyche?

Fear of *any* adversity touching our kids may be most pronounced as our children head back to school, and some of these issues are once again thrown into relief: What if my child has a teacher he doesn't like? What if he doesn't make the team, or she isn't invited to the popular girl's party? What if he has to play the "cheese"?

"What if she ... fails?" And most especially: "How do I fix it?"

Dr. Robert Shaw is a practicing child psychiatrist in Berkeley, California. In his 2003 book, *The Epidemic: The Rot of American Culture, Absentee and Permissive Parenting and the Resultant Plague of Joyless, Selfish Children*, he says that we parents are simply terrified that our children might experience irritation, frustration, anger, disappointment, sadness, or any other negative emotion. In fact, many of us parents will do anything to have an always "happy" little one.

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And "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." (James 1:2)

Well forget real suffering—our kids can't even deal with a little delayed gratification!

But if our children are never allowed to fail, or experience disappointment or frustration—if every time they get a really boring or overbearing teacher we get them moved to another class—what happens when God allows real hardship into their lives?

There's a great book called *Children at Promise*—as opposed to another called *Children at Risk*—in which the authors researched successful people who were also respected because they gave to their communities. They were givers, not takers.

The authors found is that in every case there was significant adversity the person pointed to as being part of their success, AND that adversity was interpreted to them by some adult, sometimes not a parent. There was someone in their lives who helped them see that they could grow from whatever the adversity was, whether a broken family or a dream which got derailed so they had to find another.

None of us go looking for adversity for our children. And you know what? Sometimes it's prudent to change a teacher, and I, for one, would fight on behalf of my kids to make things right when it comes to some real injustice. (Though I might not succeed.) But hey, adversity will come in some form to our children, and often we just can't, or shouldn't, fix it for our kids.

What a blessing that unlike the world, we Christians don't have to fear adversity for our children when it inevitably does come to them, whether it's being cut from the team or a friend that's ignoring them—or even a profound tragedy like losing a parent.

Don't get me wrong. We dare not treat the grief lightly. It will happen in a variety of ways—large and small—and will present itself to our children in countless ways. But what a gift that we know that "For all things work together for the good of those who love God, and are called according to His purpose," says Romans 8:28. That's doesn't mean, by the way, that He will makes things good in a worldly sense, though often God does. But it describes the fuller sense that God promises to break into our hearts through adversity and make us more like his Son and, therefore, more fit for heaven. And more able to look forward to Heaven because that means leaving the brokenness of this world behind for good. What a gift.

guttled through or ignored—God was and is there with us in it, wanting us to see it as the brokenness that it is! And yet amazingly, He has a purpose for it; one that is for His glory and our good, even if I can't always see what that is right now.

I wonder—had my parents always protected me from adversity, had they been committed to the "cult of the always contented child," had they been afraid to say "no," would I have had the resiliency to have handled what God allowed for me? I'm not sure.

I know that I hope I'm raising resilient kids.

Adversity comes in many forms, but it comes into every life. What a gift we parents give our children when, instead of always trying to protect our kids from it—when we can't anyway—we help them to walk with Christ in the midst of adversity that will surely come to them. Ultimately, that ability rests in this: Trusting in who God is—not in our circumstances. We parents have to really believe that if we are going to pass on that truth to our kids. Here's what I mean:

When I lived in Washington, a young Christian woman in a sister church of mine, Mindy, a mother of young children, lay dying. A dear friend of mine who was close to her visited her. She recounted it being a sunny day, and she wanted to essentially tell her friend how sorry she was for the very loss of life she was experiencing. Mindy asked my friend to look outside and see all the healthy people walking around in the sunshine. Here's what she said to my friend: "Do you understand that if those 'healthy' people walking around out there don't know Christ they are dying. In contrast I'm in this dark room 'dying' but I know Christ—so I'm the one who is alive. Praise God!"

That is gratefulness to which I can only aspire. But if I'm aspiring to it—I'm hoping my children get a glimpse of that aspiration! Be warned: In allowing our children to appropriately experience adversity, we completely go against the "parenting culture," and we give them a gift indeed.

I've found there are at least five steps to enabling our children to find fruit in adversity. They rest on the understanding that the teaching of scripture is that rightly interpreted, adversity is a gift from God which draws us closer to himself.

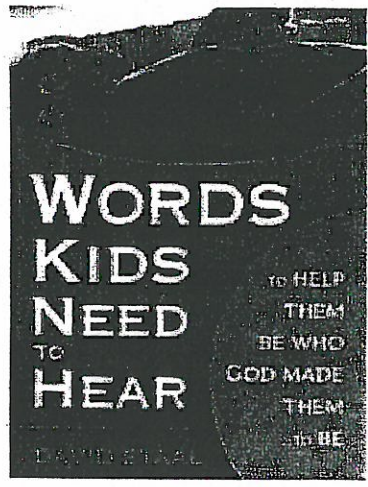
Practically speaking...

1. Say "no" to our children when it's called for. The experts suggest we parents hide our

To Help Them Be Who God Made Them to Be
by David Staal

If you could choose just seven statements to share with children, what would they be?

Each chapter in this compelling book focuses on a single statement elementary-age kids need to hear from parents, children's workers, and other close adults. These seven statements are simple to share, yet guaranteed to profoundly impact children.



They are:

- I believe in you.
- You can count on me.
- I treasure you.
- I'm sorry, please forgive me.
- Because.
- No.
- I love you.

will educate, equip, and motivate parents and children's ministry teams to carefully choose words that building up kids' hearts, to say them frequently, and to do so in creative ways. What children hear from trusted adults significantly influences their self-image, their current relationships, and future relationships—including that all-important relationship with God.

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